

SIGHT & SOUND

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ARTICLES

Nationalise or

Rationalise?

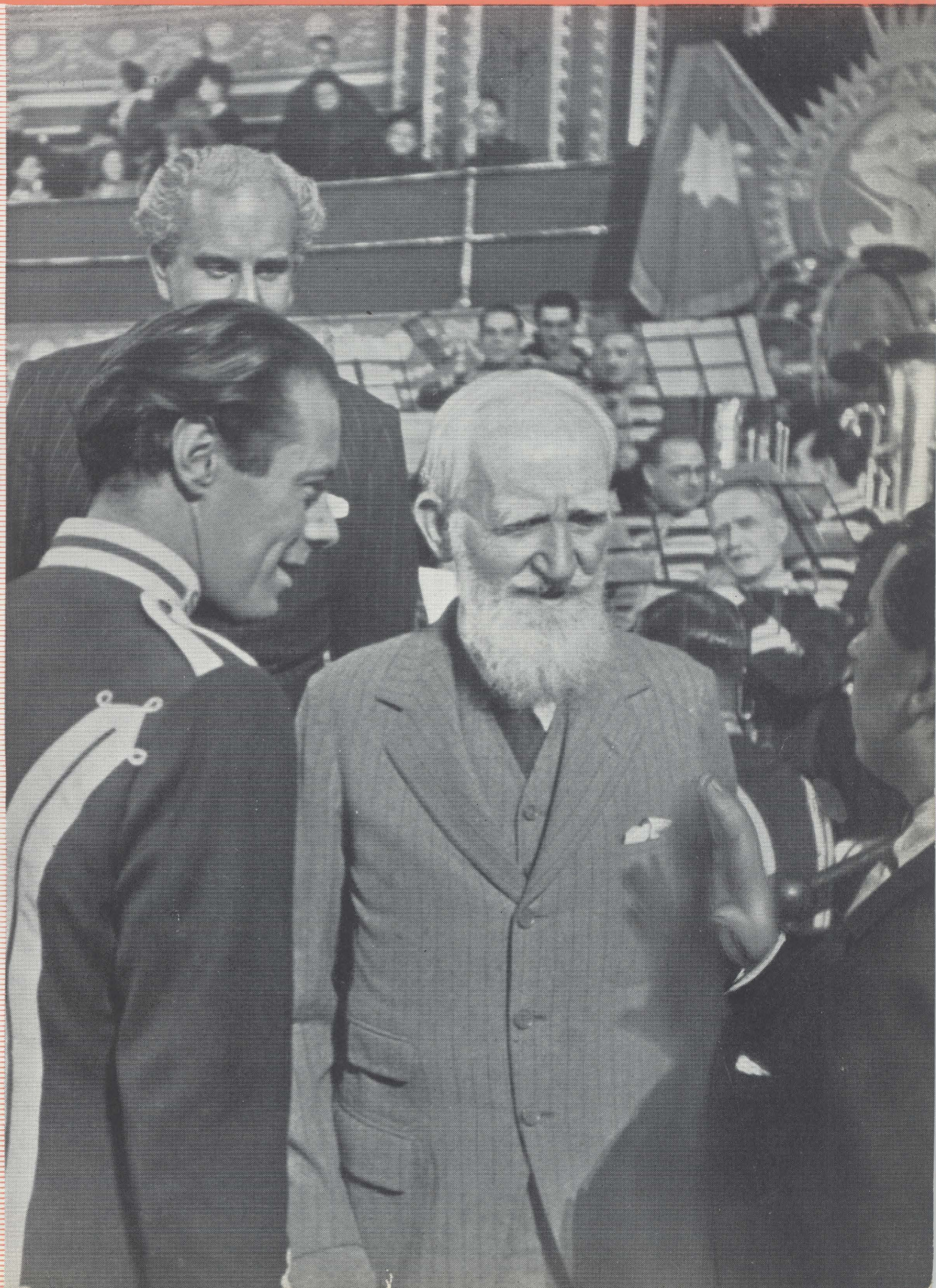
Rural Plea

Variable Stars

Sound or Silent?

The Next Step

Griffith and Fairbanks



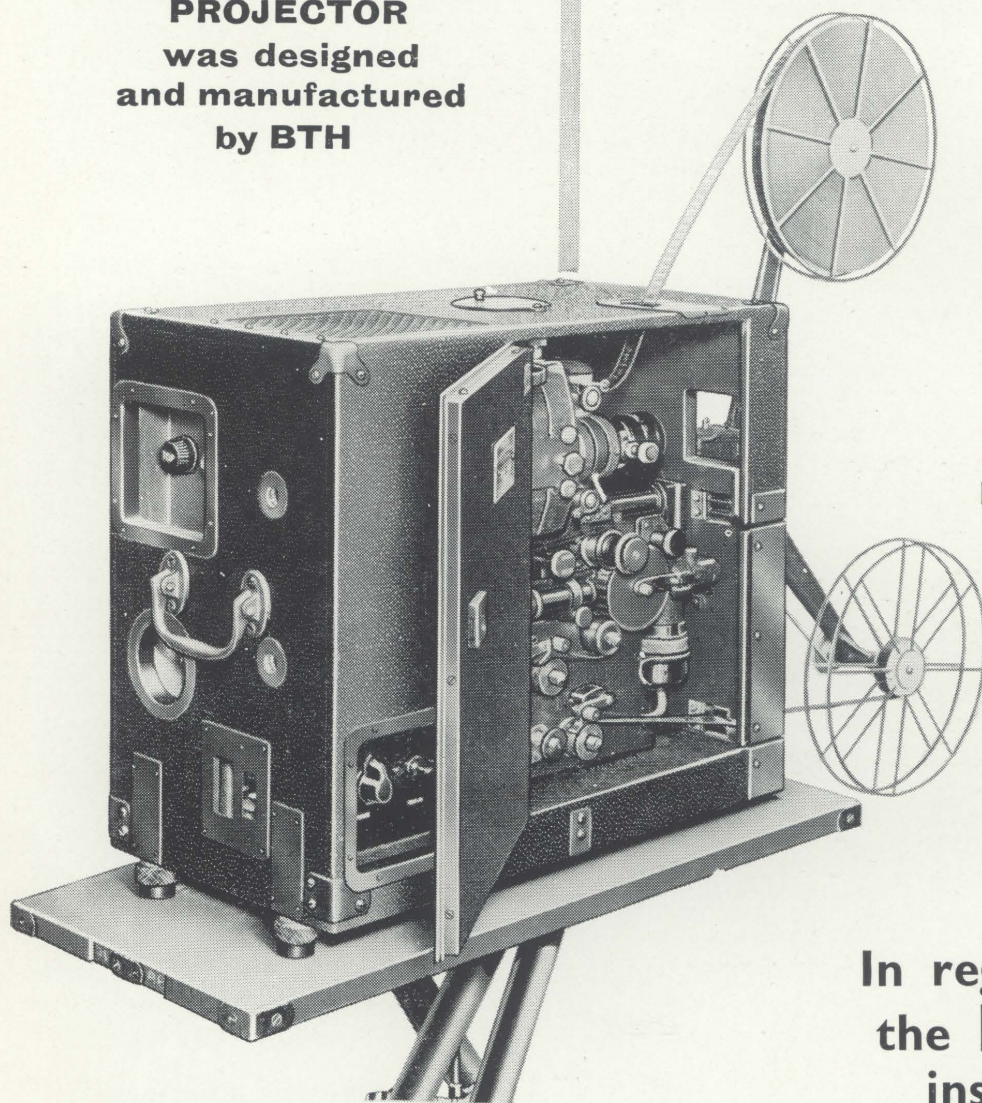
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TO READERS

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NEWS REEL

Comments of the Quarter

by SIGHT AND SOUND

Contributors

African News

It is pleasant to be able to record that the Gold Coast Government is giving serious consideration to the value of the film as a means of public information and instruction. We learn that there are now four mobile 16 mm. cinema vans in the territory. Each is equipped with a loud-speaker attachment so that a running commentary can be given in the local vernacular. This is the same practice as has been used for some time in Nigeria where a good deal of use has been made of health films including even the actual making of some locally, using native African talent. Observers say that the vernacular commentary is frequently racy to a degree and received with roars of laughter as a particularly telling jest is perpetrated. Great use is also made of the not so rhetorical question to which the audience roars out the answer, almost before the question has been put, so close is their attention and comprehension of what is being shown on the screen. The Gold Coast Government have been showing programmes mainly of war films but are now thinking of including in their programme films on travel, health, agriculture and forestry, all of which, especially the first-named, are of importance to all the local population. It would be a valuable experiment if one of the Colonial Governments, perhaps one of the West Indies, would find a small sum of money to experiment in discovering the best type of film to convey to their people a few elementary economic facts about supply and demand so that the farmers might realise something of the problems involved in marketing their crops overseas.

The Propaganda War

The Ministry of Information's Central Film Library now possesses over eighty films in its collection. It covers a wide range of topics such as *Britain in Arms*, *The Strength of the British Empire*, *Men and Armaments*, *Food Health and Education* and *Salvage and Savings*. A few of the films are reprints of the five minute M.O.I. films seen in the public cinemas but by far the greater number are new to the public. Of the more recent, are worthy of especial mention *Ack-Ack*, which gives some account of the anti-aircraft batteries, *So This is Poland*, which is a most moving little film edited out of a great deal of material that came to England with the Polish forces last summer and, finally, *The Front Line* which will be remembered as one of the most successful of the early five minute films, and deals with life in Dover under fire.

The British Council has also put out nearly twenty films since our last issue. One of the best was a film of ship-building called *Steel Goes to Sea* and there is a film on British education almost completed. Other subjects which are being treated by Council films include the blind, the Green Belt, London's 'buses, Lloyd's, British architecture and the breeding of pedigree cattle. The Council is also

projecting a couple of films on industrial subjects which will be made in colour. These will be the first colour films to be made for an official or semi-official sponsor. If they are a success there is no doubt that they will be followed by others where the subject seems to justify the additional expense.

Minnie

Only one severe attack has been launched on the Films Division of the Ministry of Information during the last month or so. It came from Michael Balcon and his colleague, Major Baker. In a letter to the Press they complain that the Division has hampered the war effort of their commercial concern and therefore that Ealing Studios can no longer produce propaganda films for them. A variety of reasons they say contributed to this decision.

For instance they resent the competition in production which a Government department was setting up with an industry already faced with many obstacles and difficulties. Instead of being distributors of propaganda films and advisers to the Industry on policy in propaganda, the Films Division was setting up as a producing body actively concerning itself in the actual technicalities of production.

They disapprove, too, of the free distribution of films to cinemas.

But the principal complaint is that they suffered from the lack of any advice on policy in production. Nor, in all these months, has there appeared to have been any planned or coherent programme of production.

Another item of news about the Division is that Mr. Dallas Bower has resigned from the post of Director of Production and his place has been taken by Mr. Arthur Elton of Film Centre Ltd., and of the Shell Film Unit, who thus rejoins his old chief Mr. Jack Beddington who, it will be remembered, before his appointment to the Ministry, was Shell's Publicity Director.

A Coming of Age

In the middle of December an important anniversary was celebrated by a lunch at the Café Royal, for at the end of last year Mr. Bruce Woolfe celebrated the twenty-first anniversary of the production of the *Secrets of Life* series of films. It seems hard to believe that Bruce Woolfe has been turning out this type of film for so many years. The reason may be that a film of this type retains its freshness when many another is horribly dated by its human actors. Anyway the work done by "B.W." as he is known to his friends has redounded to the credit of British films all over the world. It was this essay into the interest nature film which was the prototype not only of the theatrical nature film but also of the zoological or biological educational type of film which has done so much to increase the use of the film in the classroom. A silver salver was presented

to the guest of honour by his admirers as a slight token of their respect for a man who had had the courage to stand by his convictions and to win through!

New Educationals

On previous occasions in this journal attention has been called to the need for new production of educational films. During the last year there have been produced only seven films designed for classroom work. And even these were not made by any big commercial organisation, but by smaller bodies like the Dartington Film Unit and Mr. George of Chesterfield. There are now small signs and portents which may presage an improvement, even though it is on a very small scale. The most encouraging of these is that the British Council has in principle agreed that a portion of its cultural mission should be to make purely educational films. The first fruits of this new policy are the diagrammatic film *Atlantic* which, as we mentioned in the last issue of SIGHT AND SOUND, illustrates the development of the countries round the Atlantic Ocean during the past century and a half. Two other films of a similar character are also about to go into production, one dealing with the Pacific Ocean and the other with the Indian. Another suggestion made to the Council is that it should experiment in the use of the film for language teaching. Should the right technique be found for teaching English to foreigners there is then no reason why analogous series should not be made for teaching foreign languages to the British.

The second hopeful portent is a suggestion that the Board of Education might suggest to the Treasury that the new Central Film Library should possess an educational section. It is also hoped that in addition to this section containing copies of existing films, money may be found for making new classroom films in accordance with the newest theories on the technique of their use. One of the troubles of many of the films which are at present shown on the school screen is that they were made before any great volume of experience in the handling of films was available, and therefore that they can only be regarded as guesses at the kind of thing that was wanted, and not based on any real knowledge.

Should a series of up-to-date sound and silent teaching films be made it will be a boon to the owners of the 2,500 projectors installed in the schools of this country. These will also be an incentive not to use projectors solely for general education or even, as in the case of many projectors in the North of England, for entertainment purposes only, but for the original purpose for which they were installed, namely, direct education.

Entertainment for the Troops

After an initial bungle which resulted in an unseemly wrangle at a public luncheon, the War Office scheme for film entertainment for the troops bids fair to become an accomplished fact. Thanks to the intervention of the Government Cinematograph Adviser, ways and means were found of straightening out the difficulties. The Trade are now prepared to co-operate because they have been sympathetically treated. There is a moral to be drawn from this story by all public servants who come into contact with the film business. The cinema industry is young and in the past has received many snubs from officialdom when it offered its services. This has left a bad taste in its members' mouths. Now that at long last those in authority are begin-

ning to recognise the importance of entertainment and especially of film entertainment, they find themselves face to face with a highly organised industry which is prepared to co-operate, but not to accept dictation—even from its own individual members, as distinct from the elected representative of one of their own trade organisations. In dealing with films, therefore, whether on the production, distribution or exhibition side it is as well to remember that the average film man is a good citizen but also justly jealous of his rights.

Films of 1941

The programmes of the production companies in this country and in the United States show that 394 feature films are already projected for the coming year. Of these 40 are to be made in Britain either by our own British companies or by the Americans working here, using up their frozen balances in making double or treble quota pictures. Sixteen films are to be in colour, mainly divided between 20th Century Fox and Paramount. The figures for 1939 were 425 foreign and 78 British films registered.

The highlights of the year will probably be Capra's *Meet John Doe*; Bette Davis in *The Letter* by Somerset Maugham; a new Laughton *Mr. Pinkie*; a new Hitchcock *Mr. and Mrs. Smith*; for those who like him the return of Joe E. Brown to the screen after his bad motor smash and two new full-length Disney's *Bambi* and *The Reluctant Dragon*, the interest of which is that it includes live action in which Robert Benchley appears.

United Artists announce that Zoltan Korda is to direct a film version of *The Jungle Book* and that Sabu is to play in it. Of interest may be *Pot o' Gold* which is James Roosevelt's first independent venture and this will be followed by three more. DeMille is going to make three features during the year instead of his usual one.

On The Floors

Such British Studio floor space as still remains is largely occupied by American owned companies producing expensive films design to rank as double or treble quota. R.K.O. are firmly established at Denham and have a number of pictures in view, including a new "Saint" film. 20th Century seems equally well-established at Shepherd's Bush, where the shooting of Carol Reed's film of H. G. Wells' *Kipps* has been completed, and *Once a Crook*, a new comedy drama has gone into production, co-starring Gordon Harker and Sydney Howard, directed by Herbert Mason. Warners are working at Teddington where they have completed Thorold Dickinson's *An Empire Was Built* and a start is being made on *Atlantic Ferry*, a story about the Cunard Line.

Of the British companies, Ealing is turning out new Formby's at regular intervals, the most recent being *It's Turned Out Nice Again*. The company have also decided to spend £35,000 on making propaganda films. In this venture Cavalcanti will play a big part. The John Sutro—Ministry of Information film *49th Parallel* is being finished off at Denham. Glymis Johns is replacing Miss Bergner who found that she did not want to come back to England from Canada. At Rocks John Baxter is working away on British National's film version of *Love on the Dole*. This is a production which will be interesting to see in view of the success of the stage play, and one wonders whether it will be as successful an adaptation as was *Pygmalion*, and which

Gabriel Pascal now promises that *Major Barbara* will also be.

The National Film Library

A number of new films have been added to the Preservation Section of the National Film Library, the erection of whose new set of vaults at Aston Clinton is making steady progress. Most important is a collection of Russian films including *Potemkin*, *General Line*, *October* and *End of St. Petersburg*. In addition to copies of the films placed in the vaults there are copies of *Mother*, *New Babylon*, *Ghost That Never Returns*, *Spanish Earth*, *Kameradschaft* and *War is Hell*, all of which are interesting not so much for their political implications but for the study of the development of the cinema.

Other additions to the Preservation Section are three films given by Warner Brothers, *Everything Happens to Me*, *Valley of the Giants* and *Dawn Patrol*. The Library already possesses a copy complete with sound discs of the first film of this name made in 1930 which starred Richard Barthelmess and Douglas Fairbanks, Jr. In less stormy days when there is more time for contemplation, it will be interesting to compare the two productions. The Library possesses several other second versions of famous films, which will equally repay comparative study. The only other addition worthy of special mention is *Pilgrims at Lourdes*, one of the early Lumière films, and this copy is printed on the original stock with a special type of perforation, showing that it dates to the period before perforations became standardised. It is hoped that copies will be made on present day standard stock both of this and of *Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee* which is also printed on stock with a different number of sprocket holes a frame. In order to enable copies of these very early films to be made the Institute's Technical Director has designed a special form of optical printer which will overcome these difficulties.

Who's Worth Keeping

The National Film Library's Selection Committee are anxious to be shot at. One of its jobs naturally is to advise the full body which of the six or seven hundred films released during the year are worth keeping, and give the reasons for their recommendation. Another and less easy task is to decide what is the most important work of the stars to save.

The Committee has one estimate of value, that of scarcity of copies of pictures. An early Sarah Bernhardt film, for example, is eagerly sought and other rare pictures are those of Beerbohm Tree, John Bunny and Asta Nielsen. From another point of view the Committee has to consider the stars for what they have contributed to the cinema at crucial points in its history. In the Committee's opinion the twelve stars who have made the greatest contribution are:

Theda Bara—the creator of the film vamp.

Charlie Chaplin—for his incomparable achievements in the realm of pantomime and comedy.

Douglas Fairbanks—the outstanding exponent of action in films.

Greta Garbo—the screen's foremost dramatic actress.

Mary Pickford—the prototype of the film heroine who achieved fame as "the world's sweetheart".

Rudolph Valentino—the first great screen lover.

Fred Astaire—for his contribution to dancing in films.

Spencer Tracy—the characteristic exponent of realism in film acting.

Tom Mix—the populariser of the cowboy hero.

Harold Lloyd—the hero of comedy of danger and suspense.

Marie Dressler—one of the screen's greatest actresses of character and humorous rôles.

Shirley Temple—the outstanding example of the child star.

This list, of course, may not be everybody's choice; all the great stars have their fans and the Film Institute Committee would be interested to hear from those who champion the claims of other stars to have made outstanding artistic or commercial contribution to the cinema. In particular the Committee will be very glad to learn any details of the early work of British stars about which they want to collect as much information as possible.

Money Spinners

Each year the *Motion Picture Herald* holds a plebiscite of British and American exhibitors to determine which stars are the box-office winners of the previous year. The result of the 1940 enquiry from 15,000 U.S.A. theatres is as follows: Mickey Rooney; Spencer Tracy; Clark Gable; Gene Autry; Tyrone Power; James Cagney; Bing Crosby; Wallace Beery; Bette Davis; Judy Garland. 4,500 English exhibitors polled thus: (a) International stars: Mickey Rooney; Deanna Durbin; Spencer Tracy; Jeannette MacDonald; George Formby; Nelson Eddy; Errol Flynn; James Cagney; Gary Cooper; Bing Crosby. (b) British stars: George Formby; Robert Donat; Gracie Fields; Lucan and McShane; Arthur Askey; Charles Laughton; Will Hay; Conrad Veidt; Gordon Harker; Anna Neagle.

Apart from the fact that this disagrees with the B.B.C. view which puts on 15 minutes a week of Bing Crosby as its Morning Star, the lists are worthy of study if not of comment.

Obituary

Many in the film industry will be grieved to hear of the death of George Pocknall. He, in company with two other wardens, was killed instantly by a bomb while on patrol duty in the district in which he lived. He leaves a widow, three daughters and a son.

George Pocknall has been principal cameraman for G.B. Instructional since the formation of the company and was associated with Bruce Woolfe at Boreham Wood as far back as 1920. His loss will be badly felt, as in addition to being a first class cameraman, he was an extremely efficient scientific instrument maker, and many were the improvements that were worked out by him to make the studio apparatus more efficient.

He served throughout the last war, which left his health somewhat undermined but he stuck to his job in spite of his disability. He brought to his work a keenness and conscientiousness which, together with his loyalty, was a rare combination in these days. It was this quality of always doing his job to the best of his ability that led to his death. It was his duty to patrol his district during air raids and scorning to take cover he carried on until he was killed.

NATIONALISE!

"For 20 years private enterprise has failed to establish a British Film Industry with solid foundations: it is time for nationalisation," writes BRIAN SMITH.

But MICHAEL BALCON thinks otherwise. See page 62

AMERICAN films are known in most countries as the world's best. Primarily to please United States audiences, Hollywood makes movies of such universal popularity that, in open trade competition, America would have won control of motion picture production, distribution and exhibition everywhere.

It is mainly because of adverse trade balance that this monopoly has been prevented by Quota Acts. Quite a case for these Quota Acts can also be made on the plea of preventing adverse culture balance.

Quota prolongs the struggle against Hollywood's dominance but cannot affect the result and is in detail preposterous. America is required to make British films, or buy them, in order to trade her own movies over here. We are trying to force Hollywood to establish our industry as a rival which will one day challenge her as a commercial equal. The spirit of the Act naturally tends to be evaded.

The effect upon Hollywood of the Quotas which nations have used against her has been to arrest the natural development of the industry. Too little fresh talent enters the studios. Old hands become conservative on restricted budgets. Art does not thrive on over-caution.

Another Strong Argument

Yet there is even a third strong argument against Hollywood monopoly: many of the great films which have been milestones of artistic and technical progress were made elsewhere. Every nation should produce its own characteristic movies. Unfortunately this can at present be done only under Quota protection, and anti-Hollywood legislation checks the progress of the entertainment film, to the disadvantage of the public as well as most of the film trade.

So far as Britain is concerned, this problem may solve itself, for even under the most stringent Quota, the present system of private enterprise may fail to save the industry from extinction.

Motion picture production is enormously costly. Studios must be conveniently in London, or must become each a colony with accommodation for staff, actors and extras. Buildings and "lots" cover expensive acres. Equipment is extremely elaborate and delicate. The so-called "manufacture" of a film is in no sense mass production. Most obvious factor in determining the quality of a studio picture is the time spent on it—time at, may be, £500 an hour. Other vital factors are continuity of production, by which writers, actors and technicians become accustomed to team work. Technicians must have facilities for experiment: this means time and floor space as well as materials. Time and floor space too, as well as funds for publicity, are essential for the creation of film stars, by which the public orders its cinema-going.

Films from such vast, complex organisations cannot make sufficient profit from showings in Britain and the Empire to maintain steady production. We have in England experienced 20 years of unsteady production, and there can't be many production personnel who want to face more years of irregular employment, uncertain and haphazard promotion, big working hours and small opportunities. Terrible waste of skill, enthusiasm and courage has been the tragic, sterile result of years of successive booms and slumps.

Vicious Circle

It is said, with bitterness, that this is all because we can't crash the American market. There are two reasons why we can't sell our films in America. Firstly, they aren't good enough, secondly, Americans don't see enough of them to become comfortably familiar with our idiom, style, conventions and stars, as we have become with theirs. This is a vicious circle in that our films cannot be better and more numerous until we crash the American market.

One solution would be for Big Business to sink millions in a long-term scheme to establish a major industry. In this uncertain sphere of entertainment, the possible gain seems unworthy of the ruinous risk. One such attempt, a few years ago, was a notorious failure.

Another solution might be to reduce all production costs: land values, equipment charges, salaries and royalties, and to organise for a greater proportion of box office revenue to return to production. In fact, make film business small business.* This would be better than keeping it shakily colossal. Yet nearly all the talent we developed would migrate to the security and affluence of Hollywood. Furthermore, saving money on movie production always in the end comes down to saving time, so it is doubtful if our little efforts would be good enough ever to re-establish the industry even in a small way.

The third alternative is nationalisation. Through one centre organise the production of entertainment films, documentaries and educationals; and, because divisions in the industry have no advantage except to private enterprise, organise also the distribution and exhibition of all films in Britain.

The task of the B.B.C. is comparable, and their organisation is superior to that of the British Film Industry now, or at any time.

First procedure would be to take over existing companies. The progress of production would be slow at first, but at least the reorganisation would not be hindered by such familiar figures of the past as the Chief with neither film

* With acknowledgment to *Film Business is Big Business*, published by the Association of Cine Technicians.

knowledge nor taste, the extravagant and contemptuous foreign expert, and all those flashy opportunists whose sole genuine concern was lining their own pockets. As a Department, like the General Post Office, the cinema would have to balance its books, yet even so, from the first the revenue set aside for production expenses could surely be greater than the industry's working capital during recent years. The conditions essential to progress—steady continuity of work, and facilities for artistic and technical training and experiment—would at any rate be assured.

In the sphere of renting and distribution, co-operation could lead to better prints and more efficient projection in the provincial cinemas. There would be no need to restrict imports: bad films would be denied screen time instead of being forced into cinemas by artful salesmanship.

For the cinemas, first changes would be the abolition of trading agreements by which in certain areas particular

films cannot be seen, and by which there is long delay in the release of movies to many areas. The main object being to increase the total number of filmgoers, irrespective of the fate of individual halls, there would be considerable improvement in the general level of programme quality. Patrons' requests for any current film could no longer be refused, as is now often the case, on account of "bars", high rentals and previous commitments.

If the nationalisation of radio has been in the public interest, the same would be true of cinema, a greater public entertainment and potentially a more effective medium for education, instruction and demonstration.

Without Government protection the entertainment production section of the British Film Industry will die instantly. It must neither die nor linger another 20 years in futility, but find life and character and world respect, in nationalisation.

GRIFFITH AND FAIRBANKS

New York's Museum of Modern Art Film Library has begun publication of an important new series of monographs, the first two of which are reviewed below

D. W. GRIFFITH—AMERICAN FILM MASTER by *Iris Barry* (Museum of Modern Art Film Library, Series No. 1.)

DOUGLAS FAIRBANKS—THE MAKING OF A SCREEN CHARACTER by *Alistair Cooke* (Museum of Modern Art Film Library, Series No. 2.)

Published by the Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1940.

These two books are the first of a series of monographs to be published in a limited edition by the Museum of Modern Art Film Library. The number of books on individual figures in the cinema is legion but the importance of this new series is that they represent the first attempt at a series of works on notable film figures based on a new and first-hand examination of their work. The result is still further indication of the soundness and value of the film library idea, since without the collection of films brought together and maintained by the Museum of Modern Art such studies would be quite impossible.

The strong contrast between the subjects of the first two volumes foreshadows a catholicity in the series which is most welcome. This contrast is matched by that between the styles of the two authors.

D. W. Griffiths follows the chronological order. It is in effect a sketch of Griffith's career from his early boyhood to the present time. Beginning with the background of his early years it traces his first theatrical experiences, his introduction to the films, his early work in the Biograph Studios, his technical innovations, his major successes, his work in Europe, his later films and, finally, his work since the introduction of sound films. By the way of appendix is added *A Note on the Photography of Griffith's Films* written by Beaumont Newhall from information supplied by Griffith's cameraman Billy Bitzer. The circumstances of the production of the major films, *The Birth of a Nation*, *Intolerance*, *Broken Blossoms*, *Way Down East* and *Orphans of the Storm* are given particular attention but it has apparently not been adjudged to be within the scope of what is quite a slim volume to give detailed technical

analyses. Miss Barry's admiration of her subject is evident from the care with which she has compiled this record and it enables her particularly to deal generously and justly with the later part of Griffith's career which, in her own words "has some bitterness in it." At the same time she keeps well this side of idolatry and preserves a just sense of proportion.

In *Douglas Fairbanks*, too, there is a detailed resumé of Fairbanks' life and career but the chronological sequence is enveloped in a larger scheme which analyses various aspects of the Fairbanks personality. Alistair Cooke has taken the view which most people would regard as right, that whereas the work of a craftsman such as Griffith shows development and is notable only so long as it develops, the success of Douglas Fairbanks lay in creating a character which, with slight variations, remained constant. A film star is essentially a type, for the whole idea behind his status is that he represents something which the public has learnt to know and can always be sure of. To the producer in relation to his product he is a kind of human trade mark. So, after an introductory section on the making of film stars called "Creating a Screen Personality" and a concise but detailed survey of Fairbanks' career before 1915 when he first acted in films, there follows the main section on *The Making of Doug* which falls into three parts, *The Popular Philosopher* (1917-20), *The Athlete* (1916-32) and *The Showman* (1912-29). The analysis in each case is a skilful and illuminating one. Alistair Cooke, too, gives the unmistakable impression of writing on a subject near to his heart and his writing has that kind of energy and zest about it which one associates in the realm of cinema with Fairbanks himself.

These two volumes (each of which, incidentally, is supplied with a full chronology and an index and is illustrated profusely both from stills and film frames) represent a valuable contribution to the literature of the cinema and it is to be hoped that they will be rapidly followed by other volumes in the same series.

E. H. L.

RATIONALISE!

"Heaven preserve this poor industry from the fate which Brian Smith hopes will overtake it. It's had a taste of it already," writes MICHAEL BALCON

NO, MR. SMITH. Emphatically, no. I oppose, as strongly as I can, the idea of the nationalisation of the British film industry.

If it has to come to industry, let the railways, the coal and the steel industries be nationalised, but don't attempt to drag in the arts (if films may be allowed a cold, draughty corner under that heading). Such an attempt is doomed to failure—and has already been proved a failure. Let that reminder serve as a warning.

In Soviet Russia, they nationalised industry, and they went further. They tried to nationalise the arts as well. Russia, which had produced novelists like Dostoevsky, Turgenev, Gogol, Tolstoy, Gorki, conscripted its latter-day novelists under the Five Year economic plan with results too dire to be dwelt on at any length here. The writers barely struggled even to break the fetters, and it is a fact that possibly the only claim to immortality achieved by the novelists of that time was that one of the books, very, very freely adapted, emerged as a highly successful George Formby comedy ("Twelve Chairs," which reached the screen as *Keep Your Seats, Please*.) And even so, I have a sneaking feeling that this was an inspiration scribbled down by the authors when the organisers of the Five Year Plan were not looking!

The Russian film industry was conscripted in the same way. What has happened to it? We used to see some very interesting productions from the Russian studios. But instead of flowering under nationalisation, the industry declined.

Mr. Smith is right in some of the things he says about the British film industry. I agree with him that the Quota Act is no solution for our difficulties. But it is at least something. When, at the outbreak of war, and in the strangest circumstances, the Quota Act was almost done away with unknown to the British producers whose interests it was designed to protect, I, with others, fought for its maintenance.

I did so, not because of any love for it, but because it seemed to me to compare with the injection of morphia in a patient—that is to say, it was no cure for the patient's illness, but it would at least keep him going for the time being. That was the function of the Quota Act.

But Mr. Smith goes very far wrong indeed in saying that not sufficient profit can be made from films in the home and Empire markets to keep British production going, flourishing and expanding.

For far too long, the American market has been a mirage which has filled the British film traveller with false hopes and inspired the British producer with wishful producing. The British producer can make no greater mistake than to have the American market in mind when planning and costing a picture. Not in that way will the British film ever become representative of British culture. I have found that the essentially English films like *Tudor Rose*, *Owd Bob*, and *Convoy* are the ones that score a success in America, not films made with the American market in mind.

Mr. Smith is quite wrong when he says that the Americans do not like our films because they are not comfortably

familiar with our idiom. They usually don't like our films because they are poor imitation of the American idiom.

Now we come to the question of nationalisation—that very uncomfortable possibility. Mr. Smith suggests nationalisation as a possible solution of the British film industry's problems. He may not know it, but this, in fact, is what is taking place in this country to-day. As a commercial producer, I am all too unhappily aware of this fact. In a quiet, unobtrusive manner and under the unimpeachable banner of "national effort," the film industry is becoming nationalised.

How so? Just take the case of the Ministry of Information Films Division. It was originally planned, one hopes, as a liaison between the Government policy in propaganda and the commercial film industry. But what in fact has happened? The Ministry of Information Films Division wants to try its hand at making films and is to-day actually competing with the commercial industry and, I maintain, on an unfair basis. It has unlimited finance behind it, since the company backing it is the British Government—and even Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer can't compete with the resources of this company!—and its spending policy is to me even more bewildering than the much-publicised "crazy" film finance.

This department is taking away from the commercial industry not only potential orders which would keep it going during this present difficult time, but also its technical resources and man-power. The same applies to the film units which have been set up by the Services. These were also intended, one would have thought, to have been a liaison between the Services and the commercial industry; instead, they are showing every symptom of having the same itch to do the industry's work for it. They also happen to have a great advantage over the commercial producer in that they have a call on the directors, artistes and technicians who are now in the Services and therefore no longer available for commercial films.

And if that isn't nationalisation, what is? And what better solution can Mr. Brian Smith hope for regarding the exhibitors' bars to which he objects than that the Government should give away its films without charge, as it is doing in some cases? (And which, to my mind, is driving another nail into the coffin of the commercial industry!)

What is the effect of this nationalisation? Is it resulting in films of any better quality, in films more likely to develop our foreign market or spread our national culture? My answer to this is an emphatic no.

To the best of my knowledge, in the case of the Ministry of Information Films Division, the three successive heads of that Division have had a completely amateur status in film production. If Mr. Smith hopes that the nationalisation of the industry will mean the ousting of the amateur element and the consolidation of the experts' position, then the facts existing hardly seem to bear out his hopes. It is the expert who has been ousted.

What, then, is my solution? Not nationalisation, but rationalisation. That is to say, let the Government behave

rationally towards the film industry. Let it at last acknowledge that the film industry is potentially of the greatest importance to this country, both commercially and culturally. That official recognition, which certainly does not exist to-day, would be half the battle if it were forthcoming.

Let the film industry enjoy the faith and support of the Government, and you will find that it will flourish. Let the Government sufficiently recognise the potential value of the film as a weapon of war and so allow the industry to retain its technical personnel, give it facilities, let it have the supplies it needs, and it will flourish. Let it have proper war insurance risks, a credit bank to draw on, and it will

flourish. But let it be controlled by free individuals and not by Government memoranda.

Red tape would be a hangman's noose.

Finally, Mr. Smith defeats his own argument by citing the case of the B.B.C. as an example of what nationalisation does for entertaining and national propaganda. Can Mr. Smith be serious? I can hardly believe it. If he is, he and I must most certainly meet one evening and have a very long talk about it! For my views on the B.B.C. as a business organisation would be the subject for another article, for which I am afraid I have no space now.

THE LIGHTER SIDE

Compiled and Edited by DARREL CATLING

THERE WAS A BOOK—and a fat, well informed, one—published in 1912 called *Moving Pictures; How They Are Made and Worked*, by Frederick A. Talbot. I have a copy which belonged to Herbert G. Ponting; it is a mine of information, but viewed these days, cannot help becoming unconsciously humorous when describing the studios of those days.

Let it speak for itself: "Take the Edison Company for instance. We have seen the humble little 'Black Maria' which sufficed to supply the film needs of the Kinetoscope in 1892. The present Edison studio, which cost something like £20,000 to build, is a huge glass building measuring 100 feet in length, by 60 feet in width and has a height of 45 feet. . . . On the floor on either side (of the camera) battens are laid to indicate the limits within which actors and actresses must move. Beyond these confines is to vanish from the scene, and the stage manager may be heard over the whirr of the camera shouting peremptorily to one or other of the company to keep in the picture. The large producer thinks expense is a secondary consideration in the preparation of plays. A simple conventional modern comedy costs about £50, while a gorgeous production runs well into £6,000. . . . In what form does the picture play reach the stage-manager's hands for production? The answer varies. . . . In one case the author's story had been worked out to the smallest detail, the manuscript covering some 50 pages. On the other hand, a friend of mine who has produced many eminently successful picture films, scribbles the bare idea on a single sheet of paper—the back of an envelope suffices sometimes—briefly indicating the progress of the plot step by step, retaining all the stage business in his head, and modifying his ideas as he proceeds, to suit the circumstances."

Yes, I see. Now tell me, what do you think of the great British Film Industry Mr. Talbot? "There has been considerable complaint, to some extent justified, of the indifferent character of the British film play productions. British producers have not received sufficient encouragement to enable them to incur great expense in mounting or in the maintenance of a large and excellent stock company. However, there are signs of a change; and as the technical quality of the picture is improving it should not be long before the British film play industry attains a position of

importance. As soon as this happens a wide success will be reaped; for this country possesses unique and extensive opportunities for producing plays capable of making a world-wide appeal, and is rich in the natural settings so much in demand for the attainment of atmosphere."

Directors' Antics

That was 1912. And we're saying the same thing to-day. But tell me now, what happens inside a film studio? "Let us follow the production of a picture play at a large establishment having between three and six producers at work every day from morning to night. . . . One artist may appear in two or three plays in a single day. . . . The producer carries the company through the incident, it is rehearsed time after time . . . the final rehearsal completed the producer inquires, 'How long?' 'Seventy seconds', replies the operator. 'Too long', remarks the producer, and forthwith the scene is rehearsed once more . . . the producer cutting short a situation, or sharply and uncereemoniously telling a member to 'get off' if there is a sign of lingering in the exit. It is still too long, so the producer sees where he can compress the scene while the camera is working. The operator takes his position, and then a scene of great animation is witnessed. 'Are you ready?' shouts the manager. The actors come to the alert. 'Right!' The camera commences its rhythmic purring, and as the first strains of the buzz break out the manager gives vent to a loud 'Go!' The whole time the picture is being filmed the producer is shouting instructions, giving abrupt cues, and sharp orders as to how to improve the business. Although orders and commands are delivered in an endless stream, not a single player loses his head. One and all proceed as if the manager were non-existent. It is a babel of noise; the producer raps out breathless orders such as 'Look towards the camera'—'Shout out the dialogue'—'Come towards the front'—'Get off!'—'Look happy'—'Not so quickly'—'Come in'—'Roll your eyes'—'Don't move your hands as if you were playing the piano'—'Cry'—'Hurry up!' and so on, without ceasing. The actors are worked up to an exciting pitch, each man and woman singling out the comment which concerns him or her. The scene is brought to a climax, and there is a shout of 'Stop'. Perhaps the operator finds he has not enough film in the

box to carry him through the whole of a scene. In such a case he cries 'Stop!' Immediately the actors become rooted to the spot and remain motionless until a new loaded box of film is inserted into the camera and threaded up, an operation which takes half a minute or so. Occasionally the 'Stop' call is given at an awkward moment, when the stage hands rush forward to support artists who have been interrupted in the middle of some action, and are caught in difficult positions. When the word 'Go!' is given once more, the supporters rush off the stage and the acting is resumed as if there had been no interference." Ah! Those were the days.

Elsewhere Mr. Talbot mentions a different technique—a technique which, I'm sure, we would all like to see Alfred Hitchcock employ. "Many producers prefer to keep the members of their company in ignorance of the plot. The producer himself will undertake a part, and shout instructions on the stage as the action proceeds, keeping every actor and actress moving just as he desires. This method is followed very extensively in America. Its advantage is that the members of the company, not knowing what is coming next, are kept acutely expectant in order to fall naturally into the spirit of the parts and plot; they work themselves to a high pitch of intensity; and this gives the play the vim and animation which are peculiarly requisite for a picture-play."

Skipping a couple of years brings us to 1914. By this date such names of William Farnum, Clara Kimball Young, Alma Taylor and Chrissie White, were firmly established with the cinema going public. Chaplin had appeared in *Tillie's Punctured Romance* with Marie Dressler, our own Hepworth company were going to it in a big way, and, the year before, Griffith had made his *Birth of a Nation*.

Into the world of this period appeared a little book entitled, *Playwriting for the Cinema*, by Ernest A. Dench. More books were soon to be written upon this branch of the cinema than any other for quite a long time.

Let Mr. Dench take the floor: "One of the few branches of the literary profession that has not yet been fully exploited is that offered by the Cinematograph. A good many writers have hesitated to take up this new art seriously, because they thought the remuneration was not sufficient to justify them in devoting their time to the work, but during the past few months a reformation has taken place. With the exception of several of the old-established English firms, cinematograph companies now pay fees which compare favourably with the prices given for other literary work."

Thinking Backwards

Well, Mr. Dench, how *does* one write a film story? "The brains of some authors work backwards. They start with a good title, which comes in a flash of inspiration, and after letting it gently simmer, they weave a story around it. It is a plan that has its good points. . . . Idea germs lurk everywhere, and the clever writer need never be idle if he keeps his eyes open, which he should make it his business to do. . . . Even sermons and lectures furnish suggestions for photo-plays. . . . As an example of a title that satisfies curiosity too fully we might instance 'Rescued from the Burning Stake'. Now had this been altered to 'The Burning Stake' there would have been sufficient left to whet curiosity. . . . It is also essential that appropriate names should be given to the principal characters. Let me suppose, for

argument's sake, that a young aristocrat figures in a film production. If he were called just plain Tom, Dick, or Harry, it would not fit the spectator's idea of an aristocrat at all, but if he were dubbed Cecil Harcourt they would recognise him as an aristocrat by that alone!"

Without leaving 1914 I can find you another little book, *Playing to Pictures*, by W. Tyacke George, dealing, as its title suggests, with the subject of the musical accompaniment of films. Shoot the works Mr. George: "Have your music in order in case your memory fails you, or the operator puts on a wrong reel. . . . This is the age of long lengths—3,000 feet pictures are quite the rage—given in suitable sections. In these the musician has splendid chances of showing his tact and ability. . . . Avoid all mannerisms whilst playing; don't sway about like a storm-tossed boat, or snort like an angry bull, but concentrate all your power on your fingers."

Music Hath Charms

Deeper in the book he gets right down to his subject, and lists all the varying types of pictures. "MYTHOLOGICAL. Oriental music is very *apropos* for this class of subject, a glance through the list of music should meet your wants. . . . HURRIES. Messrs. Cranz, Breitkopf & Hartel, Augener, Litolf, all issue beautiful albums of absolutely reliable overtures, for about one shilling each. . . . FAIRY TALES. Nothing could be better than those light *morceaux* written for strings and piano, and in which the French excel. . . . Mendelssohn's 'Midsummer Night's Dream' music is a veritable *tour de force* for those who can manage it. . . . In playing good delicate music, a first class piano is a *sine qua non*. . . . HORTICULTURAL. Something of a flowery or fruity nature is called for here, luscious and intoxicating."

And this, if I may say so, is also rather *apropos*, though, possibly, not quite *comme il faut*: "MILITARY. The subject has, I think, appealed to man more than any other from the beginning of the ages, and considering that force has practically moulded the world to its present shape, it is scarcely to be wondered at. . . . NATURAL HISTORY. 'The Wolf', 'The Busy Bee', 'The Teddy Bears' Picnic', form a choice zoological collection distinctly their own, are quite excellent in their way, and do not require much acumen to discern their drift. They are all lively and popular, and may be used with *abandon*. . . .

Carry on Mr. George, when you talk like that the platform's yours: "MUSIC PREVENTING A PANIC. Short circuit, main fusing, film firing or similar catastrophes give the pianist or conductor a chance to show his ability in case of emergency. Always have a few tit-bits apart from the programme music near at hand, to enliven the tedium or stop a panic amongst the more nervy part of the audience, and although hard on you, you must put a cheerful face on it, but if your own light goes out, you needn't even do that so long as you keep on playing and keep the audience in a good humour. The roars of applause (or shrieks of silence!) that follow your efforts will surely recompense you for any extra exertion. Your manager, too, will feel proud of you as a valuable asset, and if (?) an extra sovereign accompanies your usual weekly treasury, try to put a bold face on the matter, because you are the man who stepped into the breach and saved the situation. Don't chip in with 'Oh, dear, what can the matter be' too often—that old joke has got too hoary, and it may mean a week's notice for you if your manager has dined not wisely, but too well!"

RURAL PLEA

Why not give the country people a fair deal?

ELIZABETH CROSS *asks the question*

MANY TEACHERS and educationists in general seem to be still unaware of the immense influence wielded by the cinema. They are ready to jump on the old hobby horse of blaming the films for any outbreak of juvenile crime (inevitably due to totally different causes and merely taking a certain outward form due to imitation of gangster ways), but completely ignore the more subtle and dangerous tendencies.

One of these tendencies, partly due to actual content of films and partly due to lack of others, is a vague feeling that a country life and work is only fit for fools and that real life begins in the cities. The Government has a (probably temporary) desire to give the farmer and farm labourer his due and to make country life more attractive in case lack of production means starvation. Many other thinkers believe that an appreciation of the value of country work is essential to a balanced life. In any case there is a real tragedy in the complete divorce—which showed up in the recent evacuation troubles—of country and townsfolk.

Country people, as a whole, are slower of retort and also slower to make friends than townspeople, but they are certainly not any slower in the uptake. Our values are different, and we believe them to be better than those of the city. Some people say we don't care about money, but that is only partly true. There are still men I know today who can only just sign their names to the large cheques they have to draw in payment for fine horses and cattle they buy, and yet these men are shrewd bargainers with memories most of us would give a lot to possess. These people are interested in everything good of its kind and we should do better if we had a larger population of such folk.

The young people, however, are being gradually taken away from the country and, for the most part, there is no similar flow back from the towns. You cannot put it all down to superior wages, for many town jobs are miserably underpaid and the cost of living is always far higher. Country wages ought to be better, admitted, but we must agree that for the settled man, with a bit of garden and other "pickings" things aren't so bad. "So long as there's a few rabbits around," agreed a labourer, "we shan't do so bad." The country 'bus services are good and now that immense numbers of villages are linked up with electric systems life is much easier. Yet, in films, we never see anything but the picturesque and insanitary cottages that look so pretty and are so revolting to live in. Never, in a film, have I come across the concrete driveways to the modern farms, the carts with pneumatic tyres, the electric milking outfits, the stacking machines and all the other paraphernalia that is worth making a fuss about.

Even the "best" village films, such as *Poison Pen* or *Owd Bob* give a general impression of people living in a wilderness of stupidity and ignorance. While the majority of films ignore the country entirely or give it merely as a place for the hero to take the heroine for a ride against a background

of pretty scenery. I cannot recall one outstanding film where the main characters were intelligent people who lived in a small town or village. I cannot think of one film that was based on the important matters that engage country people's attention: for instance, what of the various harvests, the sugar beet, or the different rural experiments such as the Land Settlement Association that is trying to train unemployed men for lives as independent small-holders, what about horse breeding (not merely race-horses which have been overdone to death, but the great working horses or the various hacks that are exported all over the world). Many country subjects may seem best suited for a documentary, but it is the general releases that can do most to disperse the general prejudice concerning country life. What we want is a few smashing dramas of the *Gone With the Wind* air set in an up-to-date England that will give a fair share to the country people. There are so many grand settings, the New Forest, the wheat counties of East Anglia, the great fields of Wiltshire, to mention only a few, but there is all the difference between showing the country workers as "quaint" characters and letting their actual good sense express itself through the various interesting mannerisms. It is very easy to make a slick amusing film, and so add to the general feeling that only idiots live in the country, yet very hard to produce something equally entertaining and pulling the other way.

There is no lack of drama in the everyday life of the countryman, no lack of romance either (whichever way you like to interpret that much abused word.) The seasons have a vital meaning to those who are engaged in agriculture and there is something exciting and thrilling about a thunderstorm when you have to go and fetch in frightened horses instead of merely shutting the windows and putting on the electric light. There are always accidents too, tragic or merely tiresome, and the drama of a small town hospital is just as good as that of a city one. Snake-bite and anti-tetanus serum are in pretty good request, and the out-patients' department alone provides plots for several shorts. (In fact I wouldn't be having time to write this article if I hadn't recently stuck a pitch-fork through my foot!) The district nurse has a life exciting enough for any thrill-hungry girl, hurrying on foot, by motor-bike or little car, or even on horse-back, to outlying farms to struggle with babies who object to this world and old ladies who refuse to pass on to the next.

Another thing we object to (on the rare occasions he appears on the films) is the treatment of our village policemen. A country policeman has to be a miracle of tact, learning, and general knowledge, yet he is generally depicted as a beery, moustached individual constantly licking a pencil. All small towns have an extremely efficient police staff, complete with dashing mobile units in smart black M.G.s ready to join in any fun that occurs in the surrounding villages. Nothing much does take place on the whole though, as the village policeman knows everybody through and through, and what each and everyone is likely to do on any occasion and is generally there first before it's done! In fact one I knew was so kind as to lend a defendant the money to pay a bill before he delivered the summons! In consequence the policeman is a kind of father confessor and smoother out of troubles, so the film idea is distinctly out of date.

No, it's time the country had a fair deal, and was shown as the exciting place it is. Producers please get busy, but do consult someone who knows something about it first!

VARIABLE STARS

"For the time being what used to be called glamour is a cold egg" writes DILYS POWELL, and adds: "American films have long had a tradition of small-part American character-playing; it is pleasant to see British films getting on with small-part British character playing, and doing it without caricature"

LESS THAN TWO years ago the visit to this country of Mr. and Mrs. Spencer Tracy was the signal for an extraordinary outburst of fan-mania. The scene, as their train drew in to the London station, was as boisterous as the arrival of Napaloni in *The Great Dictator*; in the stampede unoffending passengers had their luggage torn to pieces, porters were mauled, the streets were thick with bicyclists pedalling hotly towards a hotel suspected of housing the star, and somebody had to buy Mrs. Tracy a new bunch of orchids. Manifestations of culture such as this, of course, are possible only in times of peace; but peace or war the idea which prompts them, the idea that the star and not the film is the thing, holds firm. (Who ever heard of a film director being mobbed?)

Of the twenty-three million people who go, or used to go, to the cinema once a week in this country, by far the greater number look forward to seeing not a particular film but a particular player. The annual polls, then, to decide on the most popular stars are valuable to the observer as well as to the man in the box office; they show him the state of public taste, they tell him something about its changes and development. For the past year, now, Mickey Rooney has been the first in the list of stars, both in Great Britain and in America. This in itself is an interesting fact: two great nations unite in plumping for a boy of electric personality and exceptional talent, indeed, but still a bouncing, good-at-heart, in-and-out-of-scrapes, every-mother's-son boy; as much the essence of Boy as in her day Theda Bara was the essence of Vamp. It seems that in America his appearance in a new Hardy Family film is received with something of the emotion, which a fresh instalment of Dickens once aroused in this country; the public insist that Andy Hardy shall behave according to their notion of a regular little guy, they insist that he shall never tell a lie, that he shall not be too familiar with his father. In many ways the cinema of to-day is as improving as the childhood of George Washington.

Three other players are common to both the American and the British list of last year's ten most popular stars—Spencer Tracy, James Cagney and Bing Crosby; two of them, Tracy and Cagney, far from being the romantic type of hero, and Bing Crosby himself inclined nowadays to desert from the cradle-watchers and join the ranks of the toughs. The popularity of James Cagney is, perhaps, partly a hangover from the gangster period through which films passed a few years ago; the taste for blood has now somewhat abated, blood being commoner in urban life

than it was, but swiftness, violence, self-confidence, so neatly personified in the stocky figure of Cagney, still speak powerfully to the people. (All the same Cagney's scenario-writers will have to think up some better films than his latest ones if he is to hold his position.) The case of Spencer Tracy is different. Tracy has been steadily building up a character on the screen as the sincere, honest, tenacious dependable chap: the indefatigable philanthropist of *Boys' Town*, the persistent explorer of *Stanley and Livingstone*, the unsparing leader of men of *North-West Passage*, the pertinacious inventor of *Edison the Man*. He has come to stand for the man who never says die, the man who never lets you down, the family man, the man who likes his old clothes and hates his dress suit—a steady if there ever was one; in his way, again, as much the essence of Man as Mickey Rooney is the essence of Boy. The hold of these two players on the public imagination shows a swing away from romanticism. But the swing has not carried us very far yet; the taste for handsome flummery is still strong. And no player has yet appeared to typify the ordinary girl and the reliable, much-enduring woman. For a moment Deanna Durbin, second last year in the British list, looked as if she might turn into the cinema's average girl. But her screen milieu, unlike Andy Hardy's, has nearly always been well-to-do; butlers and marble staircases have been opposed to the family cookery and the back porch of the Hardy home. Now, of course, Miss Durbin is growing up into a film actress with Viennese tendencies.

Errol Flynn, ousted last year, together with Shirley Temple, Sonja Henie and Alice Faye, from America's favourites, is in the British list; so are Jeannette MacDonald and Nelson Eddy, Gary Cooper and (the only British blue to get into the British international team) George Formby. A certain proportion of romantic flummery, you see; a proportion of romantic adventure; comedy fairly represented; but the advantage is still with the toughs and the realists. It may be objected that I have not taken into account the quality of the acting, as if Rooney, Tracy and Cagney were not liked as much for their performances as for their personalities. That is of course true to a considerable extent; it does not invalidate the argument that film actors owe their popularity to their performances in certain types of part, and that the tendency at the moment is to prefer the honest John type to the Young Lochinvar type. This move in the direction of realism in turn benefits the standard of the cinema by making it more possible for producers and directors to concentrate on the film

rather than the star; it makes possible films such as *The Grapes of Wrath* and *Of Mice and Men*. The public is not yet quite ready to rise to the occasion; the failure, as far as the box office was concerned, of the Lewis Milestone film was probably due less to the tragic theme of the piece than to the absence of popular stars from the cast. But fan-mania notwithstanding, we may perhaps find reason to look in the future for a shade more interest in the film, a shade less in the favourite. The crowds who stood in queues to see *Gone With the Wind* were sustained more by the idea of seeing four hours of fiction in technicolor and the spectacular manner than by a prevision of the agreeable forms of Vivien Leigh, Sidney Howard, Clark Gable and Olivia de Havilland. Whether or not the Australians who, beginning the assault on Bardia, sang "We're off to see the Wizard of Oz" were enthusiasts for the film I have no idea; but audiences in this country were, I am sure, lured to it more by reports of its trick photography, its fantastic adventure and its lively tunes than by love of Judy Garland (who has just made the grade for America's first ten, but not yet for Britain's.)

The signs, then, are of a move, however slight, towards the themes of credible and knowable life. One thing is certain: that for the time being what used to be called glamour is a cold egg. Marlene Dietrich had to roll on the floor, kick, scratch and throw whisky bottles before, in *Destry Rides Again*, she made a come-back as a star; and I gather that even Hedy Lamarr in her next film gets mixed up with oil-wells. Even where we have costume and history (by which, in American films, the American Civil War is usually meant) the tendency is to go slow on the glamour. *Gone With the Wind* itself, in spite of all the box-office names, the period clothes, the Technicolor and the old Southern gentility, did little to varnish the miseries of war; the scene in the hospital for the wounded, the solitary moment of horrifying realism when Scarlett fires into the Yankee deserter's face, are relevant here. Indeed Hollywood, while turning its attention once more to the fight for independence, the period of expansion, and the struggle for unity of the American nation, period of so many famous silent films, is also realising by fits and starts that American history gains as a theme for the screen by being treated realistically; Vidor's *North-West Passage* was little more than a recital of hardship, endurance and massacre, and Ford's *Drums Along the Mohawk*, in spite of its share of banal characterisation and romantic fiction, conveys a sharp sense of life lived in daily battle against murder and starvation.

In British films the movement towards a kind of realism takes a different form: concentration on known subjects and characters. In the last year or so there has been an increase in the number of films from British studios dealing with aspects of national life: the unemployed miners of the North, the mining valleys of South Wales, the workings of the convoy system; even in such an unpretentious piece of entertainment as *Saloon Bar* the décor and atmosphere of an English pub were pleasantly and honestly reproduced, and the characters were men and women living within the limits of their milieu and class; and there was genuine English character in the court-room scenes of *The Girl in the News*. American films have long had a tradition of small-part American character-playing; it is pleasant to see British films getting on with small-part British character-playing, and doing it without caricature.

THE GREAT DICTATOR

CHAPLIN'S LAST-WAR film—*Shoulder Arms*—is commonly agreed to have been one of his funniest productions, but it represented no appreciable extension of Chaplin's scope. The awkward recruit who ended by capturing the Kaiser single-handed was little more than a military version of the little tramp who had already enjoyed so many surprising adventures in the land where dreams come true.

In *The Great Dictator*, on the other hand, Chaplin finds new worlds to conquer. He doubles the parts of persecutor and persecuted, he speaks, and he employs a formula for his finale which has occasioned an outburst of mutually contradictory comments.

That same figure which used to fade silently into the horizon with a kick of the heels and a flick of the cane has come right out to meet us, as it were, to the extent of a full facial close-up and spoken words of undeniably opportune import. This ending not only breaks with Chaplin's own tradition but with that of every known type of film-tradition except that of the charity-appeal film. It is small wonder that many of the critics have found it a stumbling-block.

It would perhaps have softened the shock somewhat if the style of the whole film had been more in keeping with its *envoi*. But so much of the film is conceived in the spirit of Christmas pantomime that the effect is somewhat as if one of the "Babes in the Wood" were to wriggle itself out of the pile of leaves, appear in front of the curtain, and make a serious oration on the proper attitude of wicked uncles towards unprotected orphans. To put the point more plainly, Chaplin's genius is essentially lyrical though his lyricism is that of mute gesture. When he ends a film with a piece of plain English he not only ventures rather far out of his chosen sphere, but tries the unprecedented experiment of capping a long bit of poetry with a short bit of prose. On artistic grounds the ending of *The Great Dictator* is very easy to attack. But, as we are learning to realise, artistic considerations should not always predominate, especially during a world war.

The film is great fun and first-class propaganda. Accordingly it keeps up our spirits and confirms our creed. Owing perhaps to the fact that it was produced at intervals over a long period it fluctuates rather surprisingly between different styles of humour. Hynkel's speeches are a dazzling display of Chaplin's imitative powers, Field-Marshal Herring's troupe of optimistic inventors are performers from a seasonable panto, the world ballroom dance recalls the spirit of the Jooss Ballet's green table, and the robustious scene in which the dictators choke themselves with English mustard savours somewhat of, say, Gilray's anti-Napoleonic engravings. The scenes which illustrate Hynkel's inability to do any one thing for more than two minutes at a time owing to the exigencies of public life are good comedy but rather irrelevant as satire, since the same trouble haunts the private lives of the most innocent celebrities—including, no doubt, Chaplin himself. But whatever loose ends may have been left lying about, the final speech tidies them up. This alone may be considered to justify it on practical, though not, of course, on æsthetic, grounds.

H. D. W.

SOUND OR SILENT?

The Scottish Film Council's Report reviews an old controversy

Reviewed by WILLIAM HUNTER

One of the minor tragedies of the War is the publication of the Scottish Film Council's admirable report on the general principles governing the production of educational films, at a time when so few units will be able to take advantage of the excellent precepts laid down in it. This should not deter any producer (or would-be producer, if such there still be) professional or amateur, from studying it most carefully. It is an indispensable reference book for any production unit that cares about the quality and the suitability of the films which it hopes to introduce into the classroom. Though it refers primarily to Scotland and Scottish schools, its value is not limited on this account, and the applicability of its findings is very general. It satisfies a long felt want, and does much to bridge the gap between the teacher who uses the film and knows what he wants, and the producer who wonders, when his films are completed, why they are not used sufficiently in schools to justify the often considerable financial outlay. It is simple and comprehensive, and sticks closely to its terms of reference. Starting with a consideration of the question: When is the making of an educational film justified? it proceeds through the classification of classroom films, the relation of teacher to film and film to curriculum, to such details as the wording of titles, the length of time a picture should remain on the screen for children of different ages, the size of lettering of maps of given areas, the preparations for making a film, etc. On preparation it is admirable; every amateur producer, and not a few professionals, might do well to ponder this statement: "It appears to the Committee that not all amateur film makers realise that to attempt to produce an educational film without the discipline of a previously prepared scenario is likely to be fatal to the success of the film. Unless there is a scenario to which rigid adherence is given extraneous considerations such as their convenience or attractiveness are likely to influence the photographer in his choice of shots, and when he comes to assemble the film the cutter will be compelled to allow the material at his disposal to dictate the final form of the film; whereas of course the plan should come first, and the securing of suitable shots should subserve that plan." Neither can it be too often reiterated that before the script is translated into moving pictures it should have been approved, not only by an expert in technical matters relating to film construction, but also by teachers and by specialists.

Silent and Sound

The Report is mainly concerned with the direct teaching film, and it is because of its advice and opinion on this highly specialised form of film production that it is chiefly valuable. It has little or nothing to say about the "background" film, which has, of course, been very fully written up

by the professional documentary critics, theorists, and practitioners. There is a brief and approving reference to the potentialities of colour, and a section on the place of the sound film, on which their findings are by and large adverse. As the Director of a Unit which specialises mainly in the production of silent direct teaching films of the type which this report is considering, I am particularly interested in their assessment of the place of the sound film in education. Their heavy bias in favour of silent films will, however, doubtless irritate many English teachers who, to judge from the number of sound projectors in English schools, and the success of sound film production of the type pioneered by Gaumont British Instructional, have already shown a preference in practice for the sound film in education. The arguments that have led the Scottish Committee to prefer silent films are well and clearly put, after which the sound film is ignored for the rest of the report. While there is some advantage in limiting the scope of the report in this way, it is nevertheless a pity, certainly as far as English readers are concerned, that some further discussion was not devoted to this extremely important point. Many of the subjects proposed by the Committee as suitable for classroom films in the appendix of the Report, for example, seem to me as a producer difficult or impossible to produce adequately as silent films, whereas they could be excellent as sound films with a simple commentary. Another aspect of this question which cannot be ignored is the decreasing number of silent films produced professionally. Nearly all professional production for schools is either sound, or the producers would like it to be sound—that is, they are not interested in silent production, nor have any familiarity with the silent technique. If these objections are significant—and certainly it must be admitted that the mute version of a sound film, or even a film originally sound but "specially re-edited" as a silent film is not the same thing at all as a film conceived and shot as silent—then production must either be left in the hands of the small groups who now produce, new sponsorship of production groups must be undertaken, or production must to a large extent be amateur, against which there are obvious disadvantages. A footnote on page 22 of the Report, however, announces that the Scottish Educational Film Association has set up a committee to explore fully the relative merits of sound and silent films. We shall await the results of their discussions with interest; they should form a valuable appendix to an already valuable report. To sum up, this theoretical section of the Report deals very usefully with many aspects of the production of silent direct teaching films, and deserves serious study from all producers of this type of film. In a great many ways its findings should lead to standardisation of production methods by different Units doing the same kind of work; ultimately, for example, there would be nothing but gain if all film maps used the same colour for sea and if there were an accepted standardisation for the representation of relief.

New Subjects

This report supersedes anything that has

been published previously, and must form the basis of anything that may subsequently be published.

The second half of the Report is given to suggested subjects for teaching films, for which, were they to be made, there would be a demand at any rate in Scotland, which is one of the largest buyers of silent classroom films. The practical value of this section of some 25 pages does not require comment. The subjects for which films are suggested are English, History and Civics, Geography (Regional, Economic, and Physical), French, Physics, General Science, Biology, Botany, and Chemistry, Physical Education and Hygiene. Further, a distinction is very properly made between subjects and treatments suitable for the Secondary School, and those suitable for the Primary School. The overlap of subject matter in these two grades is a point which producers would do well to take very careful note of. The future of educational film production is already in jeopardy, because the cost of production is always likely to exceed the return on the film. Any means, therefore, by which this cost can be reduced is important. If the same material can be used for two different films, there is obviously a clear saving of costs. But this normally can only be done if the two scripts, and an advance knowledge of exactly what is needed, are prepared. Thus, for instance, under Economic Geography, a series of films is recommended on Commodities of Commerce, including cotton, sugar, tea, rubber, timber, etc., while in the Geography films for Primary Schools, under the heading Products of the British Empire, the same products are asked for in film form. Clearly there would be an enormous saving of cost if the same Unit undertook production for both types of school at the same time.

A Criticism

This is probably the most complete list of suggested film subjects that has ever been published. No account has been taken of existing films, so that in some cases the required material already exists in a satisfactory form; a good deal of it of course exists in a far from satisfactory form. Some indication of the required form is given in specimen treatments of selected subjects. In the selection of subjects, and more so in the treatments given, the Committee does not always itself live up to the standards it laid down for producers in the earlier section of the report. I am inclined to doubt whether in its treatments it made use of the services of technical expert as well as teacher and specialist. On page 48, for instance, there is a proposed treatment for a film on the Migration of Birds. This treatment seems to me to be superficial and the reverse of helpful to any producer deciding to embark on such a subject. Apart from the considerable technical and financial difficulties involved in obtaining the material suggested, there is nothing to suggest, for example, that the subject is highly controversial, or that our knowledge of migration is in many respects scanty.

As a historian and geographer I am on more certain ground in dealing with these two sections. In both sections, although they are valuable in the absence of any previous indications of what is needed in schools, it seems to me that the Com-

mittee has not devoted the same care and hard thinking as they have to the earlier and theoretical section of the Report. Both as a producer and as a teacher I cannot help feeling that a large proportion of the films in the history section are either (fortunately in my view) impossible to produce because of the expense involved, or almost certain to give false impressions. In the geography section there are similar evidences of superficiality. While in the section on form in the Report itself, the Committee rightly suggest that any film should either have one main sequence, the core of the whole film, or a group of very closely related sequences, the proposal to treat the Continents "broadly", but including physical features and drainage, position and relative size, climates, with quite detailed references to certain parts, such as the relationship between climate and architecture in the Mediterranean and N.W. Europe, seems to me to be attempting to cram more into a treatment than it is capable of taking in any ordinary time without becoming inexpressibly tedious.

History

Again, some subjects that are proposed, while they are admirable, seem to me to be impossible, or at best less satisfactory without the addition of a simple commentary. Hardly any of the excellent proposals for diagrammatic historical films, for instance, lend themselves to silent treatment. If it were possible, I would like at some future date to see an entire revision of this section of the Report, indicating which films are wanted silent and which sound, the proposed length of the film—this is a matter of considerable importance, for example, in deciding how to tackle a diagrammatic film or a film dealing with such a broad subject as the geography of a Continent—and much more carefully considered suggestions for treatments of many more of the subjects given. A producer does not necessarily want his script written for him, but to suggest that a film called *The Army—Then and Now* should be made is not really very helpful unless "then" is defined. The Report itself has already shown the way in one or two places; for instance on page 45 the French panel suggest a film on the Wine Harvest, with a wholly admirable treatment suggested, which could mislead no producer. Similarly the Chemistry Panel indicates the number of reels and the exact content of each.

More to be Done

The task of producing such treatments for the vast number of films the Report proposes should be made is no light one, but it would undoubtedly make the Report even more valuable than it already is. For the above remarks should not be construed as meaning that the List of Films given in the Report is bad; first, it is a genuinely pioneer work, and like so much pioneer work will ultimately need drastic overhauling. Second, although it is subject to the above criticisms, there is so much in it that is wholly valuable, that one can afford to overlook its deficiencies for the greatness of its merits.

Report by the Advisory Committee on the general principles governing the production of educational films with lists of subjects for films. University of London Press. 1s.

THE NEXT STEP

There is an urgent need for an authoritative Manual of Film Appreciation thinks BRIAN SMITH

The article on film appreciation by E. H. Lindgren in the last issue of *SIGHT AND SOUND* was the most interesting contribution to the topic for many years. Enthusiastic teachers who try to introduce their pupils to film aesthetics find themselves confronted with a lack of well-defined and easily-manipulated principles. The historical approach Lindgren advocates is surely the best one, leading in a most fruitful manner to the various questions of technique, content, social and artistic values, which a genuinely humanising study of the film must involve. The following reflections are those of a practising educationist who feels that unless pioneer work is done on syllabuses and material, there is little hope that film will take its rightful place alongside music, literature and art in the school curriculum.

A course in film appreciation for sixth form or W.E.A. groups would presumably begin with a short treatment of the origins of the cinematograph. Excellent material might be found in photographs of early optical toys and diagrammatic representations of the first cinematograph machines. The element of illusion as a strong feature of cinematic art would be stressed; the first part of *Drawings that Walk and Talk*, other parts of which are often too impressionist from the teachers' point of view, could be useful as an illustration, and the National Film Library also has other films very suitable at this juncture.

The next stage might be devoted to the fascinating story of the popularisation of the cinema through the early ventures of Lumière, Edison and others, and the peculiar combination of showmanship and technical inventiveness displayed by the pioneers. The implications of the humble social origin of film in showmen's booths and nickelodeons might be illustrated by contrast between the publishing and the cinema trade. Here, too, the National Film Library offers valuable specimens for study in its early news reels and primitive feature films. A number of possible ways of treating the subject now present themselves. The growth of the cinema into a major industry might be discussed, but more amenable to illustration would be the development of the cinema as an art, with an insistence on the distinction between the arts of the cinema and the theatre. Lindgren's suggested comparison of a Sarah Bernhardt photographed play and an essentially cinematic work offers wide possibilities to the teacher anxious to cultivate powers of criticism and observation in his pupils. The early work of Griffiths and, most of all, the splendid series of primitive Chaplins are rich material for explaining the kind of movement, emphasis and rhythm which are the cinema's special qualities. The next stage would be difficult; it would be to simplify great complexities, to employ the "star" system as the symbol of the growth of the cinema into a great industrial concern depending on the marketing of popular appeals at a generalised level. Chaplin

stands as a bridgehead between the early epoch of simple props and gadgets (himself its sole survivor) and the modern era of unlimited armies of technicians and of an intricate system of credit and finance. The social consequence of this development would be present in the discussions of all later aspects of the film, and its acknowledgment would be a very valuable element in any scheme of film appreciation. (At a later stage a current and less reputable success of the commercial cinema might serve as a prop for debate. The summaries of plots in the *Monthly Film Bulletin*, admittedly unfair as criteria, are nevertheless not without relevance.) But the problem of reality on the screen as opposed to synthetic fantasy would be more usefully discussed next, and the early native Western folk-dramas and the Russian experiments might be invoked as illustrations. The work of Flaherty and Grierson is there for us to study after this, and with the advent of sound, what better specimens for discussion can be found than the early G.P.O. sound films, the always suggestive work of Cavalcanti and the essays in poetic realism of Lorentz?

The vast jungle of material on the American and British feature film since the War would have to be explored and representative examples brought back for us by the experts. To a less degree, the available material from the German and French silent cinema would have to be sifted. Means would have to be found for putting some of the outstanding modern American and French sound films on to substandard stock. (There is already a modest but representative group of British films, *Edge of the World*, *Bank Holiday*, etc., available.) Equipped with these aids, the teacher would have an exciting but an exacting task before him. Much would depend on himself. He would need both a sense of proportion and a sense of humour. He would warn his pupils against mistaking good intentions for film craftsmanship; films about great scientists played by sincere and capable actors, as well as documentaries informed with social purpose, might sometimes be observed to remain stuffy, wordy and cinematically dead. His acquaintance with literature and the arts generally would help him to draw stimulating comparisons; the famous Russian examples of satiric cutting would appear as not unlike the literary equivalent of metaphor, and like metaphor, these figures of speech of the cinema, as it were, can become sapless and turn into clichés. He would show his pupils that the same sort of pleasure can be derived from a well-made piece of documentary as from the prose of Defoe and Cobbett, that the work of a film-maker like Massingham is in the tradition of the best light English comic writers, and that Lubitsch's work often has the gaiety of a musical joke. His students would be led to adopt a critical but not a supercilious attitude to an essentially popular art which, in

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MAKING A PROJECTOR DO TRIPLE DUTY

By J. A. HARRISON, M.A., Ph.D.

A public address equipment and a powerful amplifier for reproducing gramophone records are luxuries which few schools can afford. At my school public address apparatus used to be hired twice every year, once for Sports' Day and once for Speech Day. There were many other occasions when we would have liked to have it but on the grounds of expense these were ruled out. A powerful radiogram was sometimes hired for school and old pupils' dances, but if we had possessed our own it would have been used much more frequently not only for dances but for lessons on musical appreciation which the whole school attended. The basis of both these pieces of apparatus is, of course, a powerful amplifier and the possibility of utilising the amplifier of a talkie projector therefore arises. In choosing the school projector I kept this in mind, and specified a projector with an amplifier powerful enough to do the job—that is, one with an output of not less than 8 watts. When the projector arrived I made the necessary adaptations so that it could also be used in conjunction with a microphone or a pick-up. The results were most satisfactory. The public address apparatus worked as well as the best we had ever hired from commercial firms who specialise in this work. The quality of reproduction of gramophone records was good and the volume more than adequate for 500 children. Furthermore the apparatus was our own and we could use it as frequently as we liked without the trouble and expense of hiring.

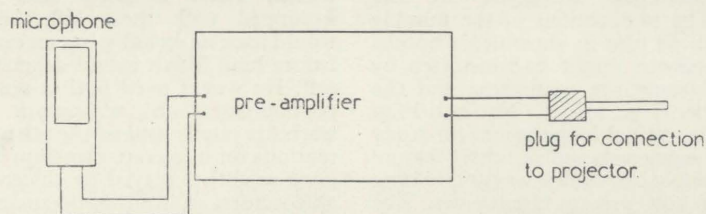


FIG. 1

The Public Address Equipment

Like most projectors ours has a plug to which a microphone can be attached. As an extra the firm supply a microphone complete with a jack connector which can be plugged into the projector. This outfit can be used for adding a commentary to a silent film or for making any other announcement. For the purposes for which it was intended the microphone is quite satisfactory, but it is far too insensitive for public address work. A very sensitive ribbon microphone in conjunction with a pre-amplifier was next tried, and this was most satisfactory being sensitive up to two or three feet from the microphone. The pre-amplifier was quite a small mains model with a volume control, and was connected to the projector with a Bulgin Jack plug. A volume control is essential for the volume control on the projector be-

comes ineffective if the input is connected to the microphone plug. The connections are given in Fig. 1. For use indoors this proved very satisfactory if care was taken to avoid feed-back by keeping the loud-speaker as far away from the microphone as possible.

For use in the open air a horn must be attached to the loudspeaker. To do this the speaker was removed from its box and mounted on a baffle board. The baffle board consisted of a piece of 8-ply wood 3ft. 6in. square, screwed on to a frame of 2in. by 3in. wood to make it rigid. In the centre a circular hole big enough to take the loud-speaker was cut out; just below this a bracket was fixed to carry the transformers. The speaker and transformers were taken from their box and screwed on to the baffle board and bracket respectively. To make the baffle board stand vertically two triangular pieces of wood were attached to act as legs.

It is interesting to note that when the projector was used with sound films with the speaker mounted in this way there was a marked improvement in the quality of the sound. This was particularly noticeable with regard to speech which came over sharper and more distinctly—the booming which is so prevalent in small sets and often attributed to bad acoustics was considerably reduced.

The horn was made separate out of thin ply wood. It was 1ft. square at one end and 3ft. square at the other, its over-all length was 3ft. 6in. To make it rigid it was

screwed on to frames at each end. At the narrow end the frame was drilled in four places and bolts with wing nuts were inserted. Fig. 2 shows the horn complete. Four holes were also bored in the baffle board at corresponding positions so that the horn could be bolted on. To obtain the best results outside the horn must be attached, but this is unnecessary when used indoors.

The Equipment for Gramophone Reproduction

The apparatus necessary is a turntable and motor, a pick-up, a 500,000 ohms variable resistance and a Bulgin Jack plug. In the apparatus used in school an old radiogram was utilised. The leads from the variable resistances to the amplifier were removed and connected to the jack which was plugged into the projector.



FIG. 2

Cost, etc.

The microphone and amplifier as supplied by Alex Black, 55 Ebury Street, S.W.1, cost £16. 16s., the Bulgin Jack plugs supplied by any wireless shop cost 1s. 6d. each. The total cost is therefore less than we would have spent on hiring in two or three years. It may be argued that the projector has been rendered less portable by mounting the speaker in this way. This is certainly true, but this disadvantage is more than offset by the improved quality which is obtained. Even if the projector were only used for sound films I would still consider it worth while mounting the speaker in this way.

(Continued from page 69)

spite of commercial influences, has a favourable record to put beside those of letters and drama in the last twenty years.

It is good news that more of the material to carry out the kind of approach to film appreciation scantily outlined above is to be available on substandard film. A good deal will no doubt remain to be done. The teacher needs more films on the general lines of *Drawings that Walk and Talk*, and he needs an anthology of one-reel or two-reel extracts from film classics, prefaced by an exact summary of what goes before in the story. (Few courses will have room for a sixty-minute Western drama or a hundred-minute Russian classic.) He needs more scripts of feature films for comparison, printed in cheap pamphlet form. The script of *Wuthering Heights* or of *Pride and Prejudice* might illuminate the phrase, "The Book of the Film". But the most urgent need of all is for an authoritative Manual of Film Appreciation, written by an expert widely read in the history of the cinema and yet informed with the spirit of the best modern criticism. Such a volume would tell the teacher all he required to know about the technical aspects of film and studio organisation, and would help him to ask the right questions about the films he sees. Training and guidance are what the teacher feels he most desires, and Lindgren's article is an encouraging sign that the experts are coming out to meet him.

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